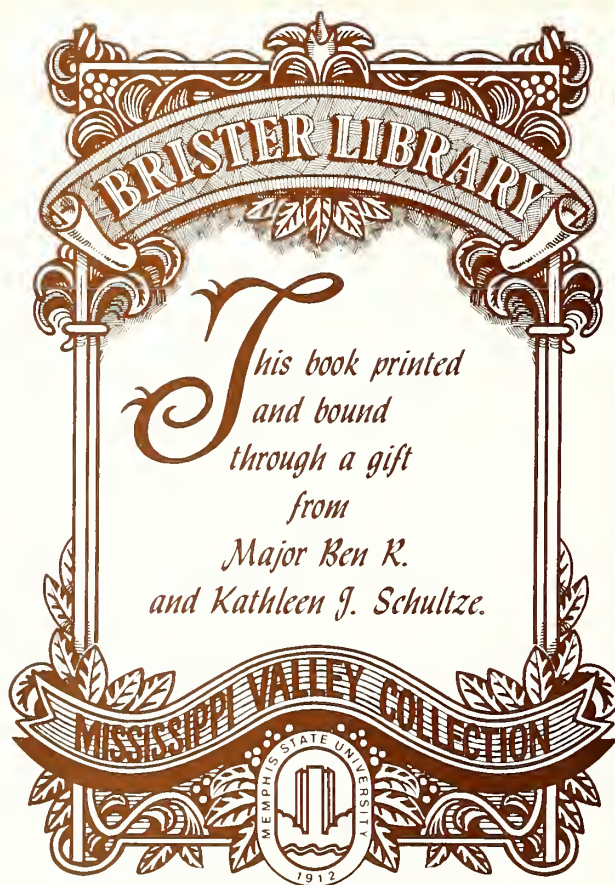


AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN ADMINISTRATION
INTERVIEWS WITH
MRS. DEON TOOMEY

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN ADMINISTRATION

INTERVIEWS WITH MRS. DEON TOOMEY

OCTOBER 13, 1977

BY CHARLES W. CRAWFORD

TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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PLACE Mobile, Alabama

DATE October 13, 1977

Mrs. Leon D. Jorney
(Interviewee)

Charles W. Crawford
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN CAMPAIGN AND ADMINISTRATION." THE PLACE IS MOBILE, ALABAMA. THE DATE IS OCTOBER 13, 1977. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MRS. DEON TOOMEY (MRS. ERSKON TOOMEY.) THIS INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. INTERVIEW # 1. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mrs. Toomey, since this is a study of a person very close to you, your brother, I think we need information first about family members. I'd like to ask for a brief biography of you. You might start with something about your parents, when and where you were born, and go up through your childhood.

MRS. TOOMEY: I was born in Meridian, Mississippi at home on October 24, 1931. I lived most of my life in Meridian and went through grammar school and high school there, graduating in 1949 from Meridian High School. After a short period of time I attended the University of Southern Mississippi and graduated with a BS degree in Education. I married shortly after graduation and my husband and I spent two years in the army.

After that we moved back to Mississippi and have lived in several different cities since then. I've taught school off and on for approximately eight years and we have lived in Mobile now for approximately



eleven years. I am teaching school now. I have three daughters and a husband, I guess. (Laughter) I guess that pretty much brings us up to now.

DR. CRAWFORD: Does your husband work in Mobile?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, he is connected with Mobile Dodge Corporation here.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you have been eleven years here in Mobile?

MRS. TOOMEY: Just about. He came to Mobile with Chrysler Credit Corporation as branch manager. They wanted us to move again and we decided we had moved just about enough. We put down some roots here hopefully.

DR. CRAWFORD: How far apart in age were you and your brother, Winfield?

MRS. TOOMEY: Winfield is four years older than I am.

DR. CRAWFORD: And you were associated with him until he went away to college on a regular basis?

MRS. TOOMEY: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: And then occasionally thereafter. So you would have been about thirteen or fourteen when he went to college.

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, he came home from the Navy after serving some time, I'm not sure how long he was in the Navy, and went to Meridian Junior College for two years. Of course, he lived at home at the time and then he went away to Ole Miss and graduated there. I'm not sure what year, but I'm sure you would have that.

DR. CRAWFORD: So he lived at home during the years at Meridian Junior College. And you were there at the time. What do you remember--this is a very general question--I'll probably express it different ways when we get through. But what are some of the things you remember about your childhood?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, let's see. Winfield liked to tease me a lot. I know that one of the memories that I have is that mother and daddy would go out and leave us at home together at night and we both liked mystery stories. Winfield would turn out all the lights and we would listen to "Inter sanctum". He'd do everything he could to scare me to death. When I was in high school Winfield was in Junior College here, I always had the big brother bit about, "you've got on too much lipstick," just really trying to tone me down, I guess. Winfield was the kind of son, looking back now, that I am sure every mother would enjoy having. He always did things without having to be told. He would remember to take out the garbage and to mop the floors and to offer to help. I'm sorry to say I was not that kind of daughter. (Laughter) I was always told to clean up my room and this, that and the other, but Winfield and I really became close friends when he got back from the Navy and went to Junior College. I guess the difference in age had caught up with us a little bit.

DR. CRAWFORD: You seemed a little nearer the same age.

MRS. TOOMEY: Right. Of course, I always thought his friends were just about the greatest, you know. He invited me to Ole Miss one week-end to the KA dance



up there and I thought that was one of the biggest things that ever had happened. I guess from that time on we really got to be good friends--more than just sister and brother.

DR. CRAWFORD: In what years were you at Ole Miss? What year was he at the time?

MRS. TOOMEY: Winfield was a senior. That would have been the fall of '49 I believe. Yes. He would have graduated in 1950 I assume.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh-huh.

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes. As I told you earlier I decided that was not for me. So I left and came home.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you were just there awhile, but he was there for some time.

MRS. TOOMEY: Just a semester. Yes. He was president of KA at the time and busy with his R.O.T.C. I didn't get to see a whole lot of him because he was so busy. It was nice to know that he was there and I could talk to him if I needed to.

DR. CRAWFORD: It's good to have a big brother there.

MRS. TOOMEY: It certainly is. I don't know if I have ever told him this, but when I went to Ole Miss I got a big rush from all the sororities. I was Winfield's little sister.
(Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: So you were there together just almost a semester. And then you left. Of course, he left the following spring. At the time you would have been about 18 or



so. Up until that time, of course, when he went to the Navy, you were together on a fairly regular basis. What do you remember about his school work?

MRS. TOOMEY: Winfield was, as I recall, a good student.

I can think of one instance that I followed Winfield. It was really in junior high school. There was a teacher there and her name was Miss Mattie Royal. She taught geometry. She had taught my father and all of his sisters and brothers and she had taught my sister. I remembered that she had taught Winfield. This was back during the war during rationing. We lived out from town and had a cow at the time. Winfield would take Miss Mattie butter. He would take her what we would call "Write Right" coupons. I don't know if you are familiar with those or not.

DR. CRAWFORD: I don't remember them.

MRS. TOOMEY: They were bonuses from writing paper and tablets and thing of this nature. I was just absolutely sure that was why Winfield made an "A" in geometry. So when my time came along I was going to go to Miss Mattie and have her for my geometry teacher. Somehow it just never was the same. She called me Deon and Duanne and I didn't get an "A" at all. But I've learned since then that it wasn't Write-Right coupons and the butter. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: Tell me about this place you lived. Was it a small farm out of town?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, it really wasn't a farm at all. It was sev-



eral miles out of town and two or three acres, I assume. I was young and didn't pay much attention to size at the time, but there was a nice large house and there was a barn some distance from the house and as I say, it was during the war so we had a cow and a few chickens.

Winfield used to have to milk the cow and had to get up early every morning and come home late in the afternoon and have to milk the cow. I went to watch him one time and he told me to bend down so that I could see better. And he squirted me just as he was milking the cow. (Laughter) he had to cut the grass and that was the day before power mowers. [We had] an old push type mower.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, when people had to push the mower then.

MRS. TOOMEY: Right. So he dreaded to see the grass grow.

DR. CRAWFORD: This was a small place outside of Meridian a short distance. What direction from Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: It was Highway. . . Is it 45 that runs north to Memphis?

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes. North through Tupelo I believe it is.

MRS. TOOMEY: Was your father practicing law in Meridian at this time?

MRS. TOOMEY: No, not at this time. To tell the truth I have forgotten what Dad was doing.

DR. CRAWFORD: But he was working in town in Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did you start to school?



MRS. TOOMEY: In the first grade I went to Marion Park School.

Winfield, of course, was there and my older sister and we have many fond memories of Marion Park. It is still there. And when I can, I ride by when I go to Meridian. One or two of the teachers are still living and we hear of them from time to time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, Winfield started four years before you did?

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh. I assume Winfield started school at Marion Park. I am trying to remember. We moved around a great deal. It's difficult for me to just pinpoint when we were where.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you move around in the Meridian area or were you further away?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, sometimes in the Meridian area. We lived in Washington, D.C. of course, when daddy was in Congress. We had been in Texas but that was not until later--Fort Worth area. So I remember going to two grammar schools; the first one was Marion Park and the other one was Stevenson School. I think Winfield must have gone pretty much through Marion Park from the time we got there to the time through the sixth grade.

DR. CRAWFORD: How much older was your older sister?

MRS. TOOMEY: Ann is four years older than Winfield. So we are each four years apart.

DR. CRAWFORD: What is her full name now?

MRS. TOOMEY: Ann Singly Pettey. (Mrs. Claude V. Pettey)

DR. CRAWFORD: P E T T Y?

MRS. TOOMEY: P E T T E Y.



DR. CRAWFORD: Where does she live now?

MRS. TOOMEY: Magnolia, Mississippi.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, he also wanted me to talk with her.
She was four years older than Winfield?

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: Had she started at Marion Park?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, I am sure Ann was there. No, well, when
I was there she would probably had finished
because it went only through the sixth grade. So if Winfield was
in the fourth, Ann probably would have finished at Marion Park at
that time. Although she did go there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, she finished school about eight years
ahead of you, then?

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh. She too went to Old Miss for a little
while.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you did not know her as well, I suppose,
since she left home probably when you were young-
er.

MRS. TOOMEY: Right.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll talk to her later. She would have been
entering Ole Miss when you were probably about
ten or so?

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of house was it that you had on 45



north of Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: It was a large white frame house with a big screen porch across the front of it all around.

I know there were some chaise lounges out on the front. I remember sitting out there as a child watching a lot of the convoys go by-- army convoys. We were there when President Roosevelt died. At least I think I have that impression. I could be wrong. You know sometimes you get mixed up with where you were when things happen. I have the impression that we were living there when he died. I was impressed with him because I had met him as a child, and I shook hands with him. Of course, that made a great impression on me.

DR. CRAWFORD: When was that, when your father was in Congress?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember what years? We have this somewhere in the record, but do you remember about what years he was in Washington?

MRS. TOOMEY: It must have been thirty-four or thirty-five or somewhere in there.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were very young at the time, then?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, but I still remember.

Just a few faint memories. I found the Easter egg roll on the White House lawn.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, Winfield would have been older at that time. Four years older or so he should have some good memories.

MRS. TOOMEY: He should have some good memories.



DR. CRAWFORD: His memory would be a lot better on that. So you were back in Mississippi before you started school? Mrs. Toomey, do you remember if Winfield started possibly in Washington?

MRS. TOOMEY: It's possible.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll go over this later with him, but I was thinking at the time it would be about right. It might have happened.

MRS. TOOMEY: I don't have any memory of it if he did.

DR. CRAWFORD: What size was Marion Park School?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh goodness, let's see. I guess if we had two of every class, that would be too large.

It was just a small neighborhood school. I know that one or two children would go home for lunch and that sort of thing. It was not a big, big school by any means. Of course, Meridian was not certainly not at that time, a large town. There were just a few elementary schools as I can remember.

DR. CRAWFORD: So the teachers would know the students and their families and something like that.

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes. Most of the teachers had been there for years. Of course, families had been there and they knew our families growing up and all.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your family have a long association with the Meridian area?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, my father and his sisters and brothers were all born there in Meridian. Of course,



they grew up there and died there. Some have passed away in other cities, but the majority of them remained in and around Meridian.

DR. CRAWFORD: And let's see your father had gone to Law School at Ole Miss?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, he attended Ole Miss for I'm not sure what length of time. He went to the University of Alabama for some period of time. I don't know how long at either place.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was his law degree from Ole Miss?

MRS. TOOMEY: I honestly couldn't tell you.

DR. CRAWFORD: We'll check with him later about that. Did he practice law occasionally? I know he did other things such as being a member of Congress in Meridian. Of course, his service in Congress was during the New Deal period. What was your mother's background?

MRS. TOOMEY: Mother was an only child. She was born in Fernwood, Mississippi, a little town between Magnolia and McComb, Mississippi. Her father was in the lumber business. They moved around a great deal when she was growing up. I remember hearing mother talk about Valdosta, Georgia, and Cairo, Illinois, and just many different places like that. Mother was sent away to boarding school quite often. In fact I think she was at Brenau when she met a girl from Meridian and that is how she got to meet my father. He was a friend of hers and her parents were living in El Paso in that time.



DR. CRAWFORD: They did move around a lot?

MRS. TOOMEY: They certainly did. But she was an only child. My grandparents ended up moving to Cleveland, Ohio. I don't know when or anything, but they did live in Cleveland, Ohio and were living there when my grandfather died. He was killed in an automobile wreck coming south so my grandmother moved back south some time later.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember about when that was?

MRS. TOOMEY: I surely don't. I am terrible with dates.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your mother and father met then in Meridian then?

MRS. TOOMEY: No, they met in El Paso, Texas.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now wait a moment.

MRS. TOOMEY: Mother had gone to school at Brenau with a girl from Meridian and she was a friend of my daddy's and dad would write to her. This is the story that mother used to tell anyway. So one time just for fun she wrote on the back of a letter that Liz Reynolds, who is the girl from Meridian, was sending to daddy. And said, "If you are ever out in El Paso, look me up." and signed it and put her address on it and everything. I guess she left school -- I don't know all the details -- but she was in El Paso and dad decided he was going to head west and I don't know what he was going to do -- going to the oil fields or going to write or just what his ambition was at that time, but he did pass through El Paso and he remembered mother and he called her. One thing led to another so they married in El Paso, Texas.



DR. CRAWFORD: That's an interesting story. And then they moved back to Mississippi?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, eventually. Dad went to work for my grandfather out there for a while in the lumber business. He never got any further west than El Paso.

(Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that is interesting. But most of his adult life was spent living around Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes. My sister was born in El Paso. And when she was just a baby, I believe it was my grandmother that was so ill -- my daddy's mother was so ill so they came back to Mississippi at that time. As far as I know they just stayed on in Meridian from then on.

DR. CRAWFORD: So they had a good deal of background and as you were growing up there were people around who knew the family.

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, mother's family was small. She was quite close to some cousins of her father's.

Her father had a brother in Montgomery, Alabama who was a judge -- Judge Crum. Mother was close to her cousins. They were maybe second cousins and some first. This was really the only family that mother had other than her grandparents who lived in Magnolia, Mississippi. We called him Pappy Leggett, he was mayor of Magnolia and sheriff of Pike County for many years. He was well-known down in that part of the country. I guess since my grandparents lived so far away I was closer to my great grandparents than I was the other. We would go down to



Magnolia quite often and visit with them and they would come up to Meridian from time to time. Winfield should have some wonderful memories from down in that part of the country.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, I would think so. How far is Magnolia from Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh, they would go miles and miles. I really don't have any idea. It is of course, near the Louisiana line. I really just don't have any idea.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now what do you remember of other relatives and visits from them as you were growing up?

MRS. TOOMEY: What do you mean?

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have other -- aunts, uncles who visited you there?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, most of my aunts and uncles lived there in Meridian. See daddy had two other brothers who were lawyers and one brother who worked for the GM & O -- it was a railroad. He lived out from town and had a farm. He raised show horses at one time. Dad lost a couple of sisters young. One sister moved away after some time in Meridian, to Charleston, South Carolina. The other one, Elizabeth, lived in the old family home there in Meridian for many years. She moved to Gulfport and lived down there for several years. Really we were more or less a Meridian bound family. I guess we all grew up together. Some left and came back. My Uncle Tom was in the Navy for awhile so he was gone part of the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did not get out of the Meridian area, did you?



MRS. TOOMEY: Like I say, we did move away from time to time, but we seemed to come back to Meridian.

The only one of Dad's brothers had children -- just one child. My Aunts of course, had children. There were not a whole lot of close cousins other than Lucile Pearson and Jane Harris that you plan to talk to soon. Mother with no family, we didn't have a lot of coming and going and that sort, but we were a fairly close knit family.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that would seem to be the case -- in the county where you were known and where the family had been settled for quite awhile. What about recreation for young people in Meridian when you were growing up? What did anyone do?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, I think back to Highland Park and the swimming pool. That was always a big pleasure. They had a merry-go-round out there at one time. That was a big thing. Of course, we always had the fair there every year. We would look forward to that. When I was growing up and I guess it was the same when Winfield was in high school too. They started teenage canteens -- a place for young people to come and go. But when we were younger we used to have such great fun playing out at night. We lived on a dead-end street -- the same street I was born on -- kick the can and hide and seek and all the fun things around the yard that children now don't get to do. My dad used to love to gather us all around and he was great at telling ghost stories. He had a wonderful imagination. He kept us



spellbound -- you know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh-huh.

MRS. TOOMEY: There were lots of ordinary things -- Winfield had his buddies, they would tramp through the fields and everything. We usually had a dog of some sort. So they always had company. One time we had a lake house out from Meridian. A beautiful place. This when I was very small. I remember most pictures of it. I did go back to see it a few years ago and it turned out to much smaller than I remembered it and much closer to the road than I remembered it being.

DR. CRAWFORD: What sort of lake house was it? What sort of lake was it?

MRS. TOOMEY: It was a little private lake -- small lake -- I had thought at the time growing up that it was just huge, but it was quite small. There dad had a horse at one time when we had that and Winfield used to take his buddies down there and there were some great tales about ghosts. I guess I grew up loving mysteries and ghosts and things. And there was a Negro graveyard some distance away, Daddy would prime us and tell us now about if we go and this one particular grave that had a well sort of affair cover over it. We would walk up there at night and we would be very very quiet and listen. We could hear sewing machines and this sort of thing. We all heard it you know. (laughter) We knew that we heard it. Daddy was telling this story to my girls the other day when he was here and they get such a kick out of that sort of thing -- what we used to do.

April 1900 - 1901

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But Winfield had several buddies -- two particular friends that lived close by us and they used to go out there with us and spend the week-end.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have many neighborhood children who played with you?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, really we did. Winfield's one of his best buddies was a boy name Pete Feazell.

Then there was our next door neighbor, Kenneth Matthews. The Harbors lived across the street from us and they had several children. Then Mr. & Mrs. Cooke lived up on the corner in a big house. He was in the bank there in Meridian. Maybe there were one or two other houses on the street, but that was all. It was not very populated. So we were just sort of the gang -- our own gang-type thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: You were fairly close in age so that you could play together?

MRS. TOOMEY: We all mixed together pretty well in ages at that time. So we would have our games going and just have great fun. Winfield got terribly sick when we lived down on Thirty-First Street. He had double pneumonia and almost died.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, and that was before antibiotics, wasn't it? About how old would he have been?

MRS. TOOMEY: Goodness, he must have been, let's see. He must have been around 7, 8, 9 or 10--- somewhere in that area.

DR. CRAWFORD: That would have been before then and its use.

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, I really don't remember too much about it.

I do remember them bring Winfield home in an ambulance. That impressed me a great deal. He was on a stretcher and everything.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that in the winter?

MRS. TOOMEY: It must have been in the fall or early part of the winter. The story goes that he got wet in the fish pond or something in front of the house playing and all and got sick after that. I know they filled the fish pond in not long after that. So I must have put the two together and figured it out.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that might well have been what happened in that case. Now among his better friends were Pete Feazell?

MRS. TOOMEY: Pete Feazell, F-E-A-Z-E-L-L.

DR. CRAWFORD: Feazell. What sort of person was Pete. Was he a neighbor?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, Pete lived in a small house not right next to us but a little ways on up. His mother, I think, was ill the biggest part of the time I think we lived in that area. She was not a well person. Pete was a wiry little red-headed freckle-faced guy. He and Winfield were the best of buddies. I know I remember old Mr. Feazell, the Feazell's grandfather who lived with them. He kept bees. He would get out there and get his smoke going and beat on his tin pan. I guess he was trying to get them to come to the hive or leave the hive. I just remembered beating on that tin pan and the smoke going. (Laughter)



DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, about how old were the boys when they were friends then?

MRS. TOOMEY: I guess five or six or on up several years there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Pete continue to go through the same school?

MRS. TOOMEY: I'm sure I think that Pete graduated. I don't really recall. Winfield lost track of him. I guess it must have been about the time that maybe when we moved away from Thirty-First Street which is the street that we lived on. I honestly can't even tell you where we moved from there. But I don't exactly know when Winfield lost track of him. I know he did try to locate him and I don't believe he ever has been successful.

DR. CRAWFORD: So he probably doesn't know where he is now?

MRS. TOOMEY: Now the other next door neighbor, Ken Matthews, that was a big buddy and all live here in Mobile now. I see him from time to time. We had a big birthday celebration for daddy on his eightieth birthday last year in Meridian and all the family was there and Kenneth stopped by to visit with us. So they have kept in contact.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see what other friends did Winfield have while growing up?

MRS. TOOMEY: Those were the closest childhood friends that I can think of and there was a little black boy that he used to be so fond of. I think it was Willie Robinton that Winfield grew up with. There were one or two that he was close



to. I remember seeing a letter that he had written to my grandfather. In fact I don't know if I still have it or I gave it to him, thanking him for something for his birthday and I think Daddy D must have sent him a dollar and Winfield wrote and told him that he had spent his dollar taking his friend, his black friend, to the picture show that day and they had ridden home in a taxi. So that had been quite a day for them.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that is very interesting. Were blacks and whites allowed to do things like that together? Say to go to the movies?

MRS. TOOMEY: They must have I really just never thought about it. We've always grown up close to the blacks in my family and right now today there is a woman back in Meridian who helped raise us. She is just the dearest person in the world. She lived in New York for many years and when she could retire she came back to Meridian. In fact, really she went to Washington with us when daddy was in Congress. And came back and was offered a job with a family, Jewish family there in Meridian, and they moved to New York and took her with them. She left them and went to work in a garment factory and worked there many years until she could retire and Willie S. every time she would come back to Meridian she would try to find daddy. Once or twice she managed to locate him and as soon as she could she was back to Meridian and oh we just had the best reunions. I had her down here to visit with us for about a week. She came for a visit and stayed with us about a week. I gave her the tour of Mobile. But I don't know, Winfield always had one or two black playmates and he still



comes to Meridian and looks them up. They just remained good friends all these years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you close to any other black people while growing up?

MRS. TOOMEY: Down in Meridian at that time in our lives
 Most people had household help. There were quite a few different ones that worked for us. This Willie that I was speaking about, she "lived in." She stayed there in the house with us. Her family was, oh dear, outside of Meridian. So she lived with us part of the time. I guess Mother was gone with daddy some when he went to Washington. Willie stayed and took care of us.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, you three children did not go to Washington?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, we did at one time. I don't know
 whether it was immediately or what. We went and lived there for some time. Because I remember we lived out near Rock Creek Park. We did live there for awhile but for how long I honestly don't remember because I was so small at the time. There were times when mother and daddy were gone to Washington and Willie was there to take care of us.

Daddy had this older cousin, Nannie Elliott, and she was going to take care of us too and Willie would try to get to the telephone to order groceries for us. Nannie wouldn't let her order anything but orange juice and oatmeal. I think we ate that three time a day until mother and daddy came home. (Chuckle) I just can't remember how long we were in Washington.



DR. CRAWFORD:

For you were in Meridian for awhile then,
when he was up there?





THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE WINFIELD DUNN CAMPAIGN AND ADMINISTRATION." THE PLACE IS MOBILE, ALABAMA. THE DATE IS OCTOBER 13, 1977. THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MRS. DEON TOOMEY (MRS. ERSKON TOOMEY). THIS INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. INTERVIEW # II. TRANSCRIBED BY MRS. BETTY WILLIAMS.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mrs. Toomey, let's discuss a few of the aspects of Winfield's early life in Meridian. For one thing he was active in Demolay. Can you tell me more about what he did and about the role of Demolay in Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: I don't know a great deal about it. As I understand it it is part of the Shrine [organization] if I am not mistaken. I know that Winfield was a member. I don't know whether he held any office or position or anything of that nature. He also was a member of Phi Kappa, a high school fraternity. I vaguely think he may have been president. I may have that confused with his later being president of KA at Ole Miss. I am not sure. I know that he was active in that also.

I recall going to a party -- big Phi Kappa party at somebody's house and this to me was quite an honor because I looked up to Winfield so. To be included in the same party as his group was quite an honor. Because they were the older crowd to us. But Winfield



was quite popular in high school and he has I think, always been a handsome boy and man. He dated quite a few girls -- couple of them steadily. He was always friendly.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he usually date one girl at a time.

MRS. TOOMEY: He seemed to have a tendency to do that for awhile. He dated one real cute girl and she was so tiny and petite and it was a Mutt and Jeff sort of situation. Another girl he dated was real pretty. She was a brunette and both of them were sweet fine girls. I liked them personally, which doesn't always happen that a little sister will approve.

DR. CRAWFORD: Yes, that's true.

MRS. TOOMEY: But they were both mighty sweet girls.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you go to school with them?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, they were both older than I was.

The first girl that he went with was his age more than mine. And Carolyn, the next girl, was just a year older than I was, so I knew her better. We were in the same sorority in high school. I knew her a little bit better.

I recall one instance when daddy had bought a -- he traded cars every year -- and for some unknown reason which was to me totally unlike my father's taste in cars, he came home with a Buick Roadmaster convertible that was absolutely beautiful and blue with the red leather interior. Of course, that made Winfield a pretty big man in town. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: Could your father have bought it for that reason?



MRS. TOOMEY: Possibly. He never would say so, but it
 could have been he had that in mind somewhere along the line, I don't know. But it was a beautiful car, and I remember seeing Winfield put the top down many times getting ready to pick his date up. He led an active social life. He wasn't on the go all the time, of course. There were many parties and many groups and things like that.

 Winfield sang somewhere along the line. I don't know if it was in high school or just what. I know he sang in church choir, but I have a feeling that he sang with some group or something in high school. I may be mistaken, but I know he did sing in the choir at church.

DR. CRAWFORD: What church was this?

MRS. TOOMEY: That was the First Baptist Church of Meridian. When we were going to it Dr. Norman Cox was pastor. He was a close friend of the family's.

 Oh, I know it may be what I am thinking of. When he went into the Navy it seems like he was in the Glee Club somewhere along the line --not the big Naval Glee Club or anything but at the base that he was stationed. I may be mistaken, but I had these thoughts. I know when he went to Ole Miss he was a member of the KA quartet and sang a good deal. Oh, I know he must have been a member of the Ole Miss quartet because he was telling me one time that they had gone somewhere to sing and someone came up to him and asked him for his autograph. They thought he was Peter Lawford. (Laughter) That sticks with me. Of course, Winfield's eyebrows were rather heavy



and Peter Lawford's eyebrows were rather heavy so it must have been singing in the Glee Club or chorus or somewhere. I just feel like high school he must have either taken chorus or something like that. He has a nice voice.

DR. CRAWFORD: Meridian seems to have been a large enough town to have an active social life. You seem to have had quite a few things going on.

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, when I was coming along there were not a whole lot of things to do. You'd mostly have parties at someone's house. You know someone would have a cook-out or just have a group of people over and that sort of thing. That was the way we grew up with our social life in the beginning. Of course, there was the country club and some parties were held at the country club, but mostly it was of a big cook-out or something like that that big groups would go to.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were these outings and parties sponsored by clubs, churches or did you have a number of groups doing it?

MRS. TOOMEY: Some were sponsored by both. I'm sure there were fraternity parties, dances and this sort of thing and church parties. And BTU was the Baptist Sunday evening group that we would go to. We would switch back and forth to different churches -- we'd go to the Pioneers at the Methodist Church with some friends and go to the Presbyterian the next Sunday. It was

just a good group of children. You jsut enjoyed being together and the churches kept things going for us. Not real active, but there was enough going on that kept us out of trouble anyway. (Laughter)

DR. CRAWFORD: What did people do on dates in Meridian
and where could you go in Meridian then?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh dear, let me see.

DR. CRAWFORD: Where did people usually go?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, the picture show was just about the
big thing -- go to the picture show and
then to a drive-in after that and coke and hamburger -- and that
sort of thing unless there was something special. When the fair
came to town, everybody looked forward to that.

DR. CRAWFORD: That was in the fall I suppose?

MRS. TOOMEY: October usually, I believe, when we had
the fair. Of course you had a date and
maybe go to the fair and spend all afternoon till the night you
know. We had fun going to football games -- out of town football
games. Jackson was a big rivalry, Laurel and Vicksburg. I don't
know about when Winfield was in high school but when I came along
even the track -- we were interested in the track and the tennis
team. Winfield played tennis too, I believe, in high school. I
don't remember whether it was a team or not, but I believe he did
play high school tennis.

DR. CRAWFORD: He has continued to do that.

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, he still enjoys it. Meridian was not
a big social capital to speak of -- just
small town activities.



DR. CRAWFORD: You always seemed to have something to do.

MRS. TOOMEY: Right. It seems like somebody had something going most of the time.

DR. CRAWFORD: What about athletics? He played on the football team?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, he did play on the football team. Winfield never participated in the games a great deal, but did stay on the team. He must have enjoyed it because he had to walk home -- which was a great distance -- hitchhike to get home. Then he had his chores to do when he got home. He stuck with it.

DR. CRAWFORD: When he came in in the evening after football practice usually tired I suppose, what chores did he have to do?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, when we lived out from town -- out Highway 45--the house sat up on a hill. And it was a nice-sized yard. Winfield would have to take care of the grass. He had to cut the grass with an old push mower and at one time we had a cow and that meant that he had to milk the cow before he went to school, when he came home in the afternoon. I suspect the yard cutting was more toward the week-ends because of the other things he had to do. But he was always good about helping around the house doing that sort of thing. We had a little puppy and he would whistle for her just as soon as he hit the driveway. She would listen for him and wait for him to whistle. She was a little toy terrier.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember this as being the only dog that you as children had while you were growing up?



MRS. TOOMEY: We always had an animal of some kind. I don't think there was any single animal -- domesticated animal -- that we didn't have at one time or the other. We've had canaries. Daddy had a monkey at one time when we were in Washington. When I was a baby we had a little black goat. We always had dogs -- either bird dogs or bull dogs or some kind of animal. Daddy had always loved animals and Winfield seems to have taken after him in that respect. He loves animals too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Does he love any certain kind of animal more than others?

MRS. TOOMEY: You know, I don't know. Winfield used to love to go out to my uncle's when Uncle Charles raised horses. He had a horse, more or less, of his own, Hessie. He loved to ride it. So I guess dogs and horses more than cats perhaps. He has always had a dog around him and a horse when possible.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember when you got your first television sets?

MRS. TOOMEY: No, I was grown and married before we had a television set. Daddy and mother didn't have one until they were back in Washington. Dad was working with the Department of Justice. So we were all grown before we had television sets. Radio was our big thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you grow up listening to radio?



MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: What were the favorite programs that you and Winfield listened to?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, my taste ran toward the mysteries -- Inter Sanctum, D.A. [Mr. District Attorney] and Gang Busters and this sort of thing. Of course, there was always Fibber McGhee and Molly, Amos and Andy, George Burns and Gracie Allen. Those are the only ones I can recall offhand.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, you listened quite a lot?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes, that was your entertainment. There was nothing else to do. You either read or listened to the radio.

DR. CRAWFORD: What reading did you do at home?

What did you have to read at home?

MRS. TOOMEY: There was always plenty of reading material available -- Daddy had the classics -- always lots and lots of books. I think Winfield read a good bit. I don't know whether he read The Rover Boys, Tom Swift, probably did, Robinson Crusoe that sort of thing, the general type -- young people's literature. I grew up on Nancy Drew. Judy Bolton was the other one. My dad has always been an avid reader. There has always been plenty of reading material around if you cared to take what was available.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had plenty of books then.

MRS. TOOMEY: Right. The library was available. I used to go to the library quite often and



Winfield probably did too.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you prefer any certain kind of reading?

MRS. TOOMEY: I remember in jr. high school I always liked to read the Little Miss books -- Little Miss in Nantucket, Little Miss of Rhode Island. Then I graduated on into the Nancy Drew Mystery Stories. I thoroughly enjoy reading now. I think that is one of the greatest pleasures. You can just get away from everything by reading.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was Winfield's favorite kind of reading?

MRS. TOOMEY: I really don't know. I honestly don't know.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember seeing him reading a book?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes, magazines. I don't know whether it was Boy's Life or something like that. I really don't remember. As I said, until we grew up a little bit Winfield didn't have a whole lot of time for me. I was in the way -- four years younger. I was a little sister and always in the way. But he did appreciate my making gingerbread. I used to make gingerbread when he was bringing some friends home with him. I tried to impress them. Winfield and I were just like any normal boys and girls. We fought, you know, just like everybody does. After we were older we got to be closer and didn't get in each other's way quite so much.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have newspapers around the house?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes. The Meridian Star was the town newspaper and came out just once a day -- no evening edition. Of course, The Commercial Appeal, I assume was available. It is now. And the Jackson paper. I assume Daddy read those. I don't remember it, but I feel like they were there. The Meridian



Star is still going strong, still in the hands of the same family.

I have a suspicion that we had the National Geographic somewhere along the line.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the kind of magazines then, other than the National Geographic?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh there was Life, Look and I feel sure there was a Reader's Digest around -- type of thing. I especially remember Life Magazine. It was so full of pictures. And Look, Newsweek, Time.

Of course, there were women's magazines available too. Mother would buy magazines occasionally. She didn't enjoy reading as much. Mother was so talented with her hands. She loved to knit. She sewed a great deal. She made most of my clothes till I was almost grown. She sewed beautifully. She would make jackets for daddy and they looked professional. So mother really enjoyed that sort of thing more. She was a good cook. There's a story that's probably not relevant, about when Winfield was in the Navy.

DR. CRAWFORD: It might be very interesting though.

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, she, of course, was thinking about her baby boy you know. He was up in the Great Lakes or somewhere awfully cold.

DR. CRAWFORD: Might have been the Great Lakes Naval Training Station.

MRS. TOOMEY: I think that is where he was. Mother was thinking about him. She figured he was probably homesick so she decided she would send him some fried chicken. Of course, it probably only took it three weeks to get there. (Laughter)



It was ruined of course. I'm sure mother just never thought about that. She just wanted to get Winfield some fried chicken. (Laughter)
Oh dear!

DR. CRAWFORD: He appreciated her cooking, I suppose?

MRS. TOOMEY: Winfield was always very fond of mother. He
 just thought she was the greatest. Winfield
has a great deal of my grandfather's characteristics.

DR. CRAWFORD: How do you describe that?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, my grandfather was a quiet man, mild
 mannered, easy going, and very affectionate
and I find these qualities in Winfield quite often. He loves his
family and like to keep in touch and everything. I see so many of
these qualities of my mother's father in him. Of course, he has a
good blend of the two -- of my father and my grandfather.

DR. CRAWFORD: Your father's public service?

MRS. TOOMEY: And his natural ability -- his speaking ability
 and his good mind. They both have excellent
minds. I don't guess there was much that daddy ever wanted to do
that he hasn't been able to do and do it well. I find this in Win-
field. When he sets his mind to do he does it well. But my grand-
father, my mother's father was a different type man. He was quiet,
and unassuming, thoughtful and this sort of thing. I find these same
characteristics in Winfield.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if Winfield spent much time with
 his grandfather?

MRS. TOOMEY: No, he didn't spend very much time with him.



We maybe saw them perhaps once a year. But my grandfather was very good at writing. He would write to Winfield and carry on a correspondence. I have now -- I believe I still have it -- a letter that he wrote to Winfield. It was entitled, "My dear grandson." He wanted to give him some of his family's history -- about some of the things he had gone through as a young man and where his family had come from. Part of his family tree and this sort of thing. Which I think is very interesting. Because we were never very close to them. We knew my great grandparents better than the grandparents.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see where were your grandparents living during most of this time?

MRS. TOOMEY: Cleveland, Ohio. The distance was so that we did not get to see them very often.

DR. CRAWFORD: And your great grandparents were where during this time?

MRS. TOOMEY: In Magnolia, Mississippi. They always lived there.

DR. CRAWFORD: How did your sister happen to go to Magnolia?

MRS. TOOMEY: Lives there now?

DR. CRAWFORD: Uh-huh.

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, my sister's first husband died. He died just about two days before their last son was born. They were living in Gulfport at the time. After Ann had been a widow several years she renewed an old acquaintance of a boy she had dated down in Magnolia, Mississippi when we used to



go down there and spend time in the summer. She had dated Claude. He was close to the family and everything. In fact he married our cousin, Eleanor Leggett. Eleanor had died a few years earlier and they never had had any children. So Claude had come to Gulfport to visit his brother and he and Ann renewed an old acquaintance and dated awhile and married. She moved to Magnolia and Claude is a dentist in Magnolia. So it is a little confused, but in a way she has come full circle. She used to date down there and we had wonderful times in Magnolia. Then she ends up marrying going back there to live.

DR. CRAWFORD: Is Magnolia a very small town?

MRS. TOOMEY: Very small. The big event of the day they used to laugh and say was when the Panama Limited came through. (Laughter) So you can imagine the size!

DR. CRAWFORD: What about your religious experiences?
You both went to the First Baptist Church in Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you particularly religious or just about ordinarily so?

MRS. TOOMEY: I think we were probably ordinarily religious.
I was. Winfield, I think, was a little bit better about going to church than I was. I went to Sunday School most Sundays and quite often I would sneak away and not go to church and would go down to the drug store and get something to drink and ride on home. But Winfield would stay and sing in the choir. I'm not sure if he was active in the BTU or not. That is the Sunday night services for young people. I was from time to time. We would



go to different churches with different friends. If they were doing something we all especially wanted to do, everybody would go to this one, you know. It was a small enough town that you knew what everybody was doing and if their's sounded more like more fun than yours you went there. So we just visited around a great deal.

DR. CRAWFORD: It sounds like a fairly close community.

MRS. TOOMEY: It really was. Meridian is a pretty little town. It is sort of down in a valley. It was -- maybe protected is the word. I don't know if there was ever a great deal going on of national importance. Everybody just lived their life and grew up mostly happy and contented people.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did people who grew up there in large numbers tend to stay around Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: I think so -- the majority of my friends. I guess the majority of them are still there, and a great deal of Winfield's friends are there. They've married and stayed on in Meridian. Some were professional people, dentists, lawyers, and this sort of thing have come back to Meridian to practice. Some have inherited the family business and continue to do that. There have always been exceptions of course, of people that move away and start somewhere else, but I would say the majority of our groups have stayed around Meridian.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you very conscious of national politics when you were growing up?

MRS. TOOMEY: I don't recall myself being . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: Did Winfield have any particular interest in it at that time?



MRS. TOOMEY: Not that I recall. When we lived there during the war, I would see the caravans come by and all and we had gas rationing and there was sugar rationing and I remember that President Roosevelt died at this time. I remember being extremely touched by that. I had met him and I felt -- even though I was just a little thing -- I felt like I really knew him. He had given me this impression. Other than that, that is all I really recall about national political things.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did your father discuss political things very often?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh he would discuss them at home. I don't know that Winfield listened. I didn't. I was too little to be interested in that sort of thing. People would come to the house, you know, and they would sit and talk. We had a screen porch on the front and late in the afternoon in the summer you would sit out there where it was cool and sometimes if you didn't have anything else to do, you'd just lie down and listen to the grown-ups talk you know. I'm sure maybe some of it soaked in without your being conscious of it. I don't really recall a big to do over it -- politics. Local of course, you heard a lot more about. I don't recall national.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you remember about your experience in Washington? I know you were quite young then.

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MRS. TOOMEY: I remember Rock Creek Park. I thought it was absolutely marvelous. I had never seen anything like it. There was a fiord, and I had never heard the word before. We crossed and I thought that was wonderful that there could be a road that water ran across. I just loved to go back and forth across the road. One time when we were there, it must have been in the middle of the winter because of a lot of snow, I remember we had a sled and Dad would tie the sled on the back of the car and pull us on the sled -- Winfield and I. I am sure there were probably one or two of the children in the neighborhood. They tell me that I was a pain in the neck. That all I wanted to do was come in and out get dressed and undressed and dressed and undressed. (Laughter) This Willie that I mentioned to you before -- we laugh today about how many times she had to change my snow suit because it would get cold out there.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, you did not have any other brothers or sisters then -- the three of you?

MRS. TOOMEY: Just the three.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you ever close to any cousins?

MRS. TOOMEY: I had one cousin that was my age. Winfield didn't have any male cousins. All his cousins were female. They were all, let's see, two of them were older than Winfield and the others were my age. So those were the only close cousins that Winfield had. When we would go to Magnolia, there were cousins down there that were really more distantly kin, but I guess Winfield was a lot closer to. George Leggett was his own age.





MRS. TOOMEY: I am sure he went and probably went with dad.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember your daddy going hunting?

MRS. TOOMEY: Just a few times -- not a great deal. I guess bird hunting more than most anything.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember anything about his leaving for the Navy? About how old was he then? Close to seventeen?

MRS. TOOMEY: I believe it was just before he graduated from high school that he decided that he wanted to be a part of what was happening. I'm sure he talked with dad and they both probably felt this would be a good experience for him, help him mature and everything. So he did. He enlisted into the Navy. I believe he went right on the Great Lakes. I am not sure. I was not terribly impressed with Winfield at this age. He was in my way. (Laughter) He was big brother trying to tell me what to do.

DR. CRAWFORD: He would have been about seventeen and you would have been about fourteen or thirteen or somewhere along there. He was in about two years?

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh. Two years.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember about his assignments other than Great Lakes Naval Training Station?

MRS. TOOMEY: It seems like he went to Virginia or some place. I am not sure about that. I know



he was trained as a hospital corpsman or along that line. Then he went to Hawaii. I think the war ended before he could get into it like he wanted to. But he did end up going to Hawaii. He helped deliver a baby while he was in there. It was quite an experience for him. The man whose wife had the baby lives here in Mobile. They renewed that acquaintance when Winfield came down one time. It was something.

DR. CRAWFORD: Was that when he was in Hawaii?

MRS. TOOMEY: It must have been. Uh-huh. I don't know.

He had to go somewhere after Great Lakes, I assume, for some other training, for his hospital type training so it must have been stateside when this happened.

It was funny that he should be from Mobile and remember Winfield after all this time.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did he ever as far as you know consider staying in Naval Service?

MRS. TOOMEY: Not that I know of.

DR. CRAWFORD: What was his R.O.T.C. training there when he was back at Ole Miss?

MRS. TOOMEY: As far as I know the unit there was just a regular army unit. I don't know what their affiliation was, whether it was artillery or what branch it was. I don't even know. Winfield was a member of Scabbard and Blade, I believe, which was an honorary type organization I think. It seems like he was commander or something of the sort. I really don't remember too well.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember while he was away, did he stay in touch by writing?



MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes, he wrote often and he would send pictures to kind of keep us abreast of what he was doing. He sent me a charm bracelet from Hawaii and I just . . . It had a hula girl on it that wiggled and that was absolutely marvelous. Of course, he wrote very regularly to mother and daddy.

DR. CRAWFORD: What do you remember about his homecoming from service?

MRS. TOOMEY: I honestly don't remember a thing -- just suddenly he was home. .

DR. CRAWFORD: The war was over by that time?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes. He probably came to New Orleans and mother and daddy came and met him there or something or maybe it was in Jackson, I'm not sure. I really don't have any memory of that at all. I really don't.

DR. CRAWFORD: But you felt closer to him after he returned?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes, I did, but I had grown up some in the meantime. Winfield started to junior college in June. What we actually had in Meridian was a senior high and a junior college together. It was the last two years of high school and two years of junior college were all in one building and one campus. So when Winfield came back and I believe two or three of his friends had been in the service too. They were all back at the same time, sort of picked up where they left off from high school. Of

course, I was in high school at that time. That's what made us all a little bit closer.

DR. CRAWFORD: You went to your classes in some of the same buildings?

MRS. TOOMEY: Right. Of course, the boys were older then. They had to start dating younger girls because of their age, probably most had been married by that time. So he dated some of the girls just a little older than myself. We would find each other at the same parties sometime or something. We just got to be a little bit closer and when Winfield went to Ole Miss he invited me up to one of their dances up there. I just thought that was marvelous.

My girls say right now, "Oh, I wish I had an older brother to go away and invite me." (Laughter) But he was thoughtful.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember who his friends were that he went to junior college with in Meridian?

MRS. TOOMEY: That was Frank Purnell, Billy Melton, and Sonny Gilmore, I believe, and James McGinnis. I guess those were his closest friends that perhaps I saw more of. They had gone through high school together. There were not a great many boys back at junior college. Some had gone away to four-year colleges. I think these were the main ones that had come back and gone to junior college with Winfield — Monk and Billy Melton. No, Frank doesn't live there any longer. Those two boys are still in Meridian living.



DR. CRAWFORD: What are they doing there now?

MRS. TOOMEY: James "Monk" McGinnis has gone into his father's lumber business. Billy Melton is County Commissioner, I believe. I don't believe Frank Purnell is in Meridian. Sonny Gilmore is a dentist and he came back to Meridian to practice.

DR. CRAWFORD: He lived at home then, didn't he?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes. We lived right across the street from the school at that time.

DR. CRAWFORD: You had moved into town then?

MRS. TOOMEY: Yes.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you like that better than being further out?

MRS. TOOMEY: Oh yes. I was not happy out from town. I didn't really drive myself. I wasn't old enough to drive. To be able to go anywhere somebody had to take me or pick me up. It was gas rationing and I was pretty well confined. When we moved back in town it was much nicer because we were up there at the high school and the college and tennis courts down the street from us. And that is where I learned to play tennis and Winfield played. I played with the girl's basketball team. So it was convenient for me to be more active in things than I had been able to be.

DR. CRAWFORD: After two years there, he left. Let's see, what age were you then? You were about



through high school too.

MRS. TOOMEY: I was probably about beginning my junior year because Winfield went on to Ole Miss for two more years. Probably my junior year because when I graduated I went to Ole Miss and it was Winfield's senior year. I didn't stay at Ole Miss too long.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now, in this project, Mrs. Toomey, who else do you feel should be interviewed?

MRS. TOOMEY: Well, you have my first cousins' names there in Jackson and you have my sister's name and as far as family goes there is not a whole lot of our immediate family left that perhaps knew Winfield when he was growing up. Unless perhaps you might like to contact one or two of Winfield's friends there in Meridian. I can't think of anyone else. There may be still a teacher left from Marion Park -- I am not sure -- Frances Miller. Her name is Mrs. Frances Miller. I think possibly may still be alive in Meridian now. Oh and Miss Maude Smith. She was a senior high teacher. I am sure Winfield had her for English.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mrs. Frances Miller.

MRS. TOOMEY: I am sure daddy could tell you probably if she is still [there].

DR. CRAWFORD: I could check with him since he is closer to it. Mrs. Frances Miller was a teacher.

MRS. TOOMEY: She was either fifth or sixth grade teacher at Marion Park.



DR. CRAWFORD: And Miss Maude Smith.

MRS. TOOMEY: She would have taught Winfield in high school. She was an English teacher. Fact is, I believe her brother was named for my dad. I'm not sure that either of these ladies are still alive, but there is a possibility that they are.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, we can find out. Now of the friends of his who might be available in Meridian, who would you suggest?

MRS. TOOMEY: James McGinnis and Sonny Gilmore. I am trying to think what his name is.

DR. CRAWFORD: I could look it up.

MRS. TOOMEY: Possibly Billy Melton.

DR. CRAWFORD: What does he do now?

MRS. TOOMEY: I believe it's County Commissioner.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you think of any other details that would be particularly interesting in a biography of this man?

MRS. TOOMEY: I am just thinking. Willie who helped to raise us and went to Washington is there in Meridian if you would be interested in talking to her. Her name is Willamina Nettleson.

DR. CRAWFORD: Let's see, Mrs. . . .

MRS. TOOMEY: Mrs. Willamina Nettleson. Winfield has seen her since she has been back.

DR. CRAWFORD: Now she is the old black lady who helped take care of you.

MRS. TOOMEY: Except she isn't black. She is part Indian



and very light skinned and she is 67 years old. Hardly a wrinkle in her face. Cutest thing you have ever seen.

DR. CRAWFORD: I am careful to call all colored people black people these days.

MRS. TOOMEY: Uh-huh. Of course, dad might have some better suggestions than these.

DR. CRAWFORD: I'll go over this with him of course.

Mrs. Toomey, what do you think was the major influence your mother had on Winfield? What do you think he would have learned most from her?

MRS. TOOMEY: Mother was a very affectionate person. She was a very easy-going person. I don't think Winfield ever wanted to disappoint her. He wanted to please her. I don't think he ever would knowingly do anything to hurt her or to embarrass her. He just had this admiration for her and wanted to be the son she could be proud of. My father was a strict disciplinarian. When he said to do something we knew that he meant it. When we were trying to get out of something we went to mother. We never went to daddy to try to get out of anything. (Laughter) But there was, as I look back, always a closeness between mother and Winfield. Maybe, because as I said earlier, he was a good deal like my grandfather. Maybe she saw some of these qualities in him early, I don't know. But he has just always looked up to her and loved her and wanted her to be proud of him.

I think, as I said, dad was pretty strict. If he said, "Jump", we wanted to know how high! And this sort of thing. Of course, dad was gone a good bit of the time during his political time, traveling



and all. I think Winfield has a great deal of my father's qualities -- his speaking ability, his good mind and I'm sure he also wanted his father to be proud of him. It may have been a certain amount of competition deep down within Winfield knowing the honors that my father had. This possibly might have pushed him to do some of the things that he has done. I am not sure.

DR. CRAWFORD: How much do you think religion has motivated or influenced him?

MRS. TOOMEY: I honestly don't know. I know Winfield was brought up in the church and we've never gotten into a real deep religious discussion. He is active in the church -- especially since he has been married. He has taken part and has taught Sunday School and this sort of thing. He went regularly as a young person. But he certainly is not overly religious, but he lives the golden rule. Maybe that is not the best thing to say. But he treats people like he would like to be treated -- honestly and that sort of thing. So I am sure that comes a lot from religious background.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know if he had any particular heroes growing up? I know he has a good deal of admiration for and interest in Lincoln now.

MRS. TOOMEY: I don't recall any offhand. Of course, he grew up hearing about the Key Brothers-- Al and Fred who had set the endurance record. Maybe there was a baseball hero possibly. I don't recall hearing of anyone in particular that Winfield tried to emulate or anything like that. Just men of the day and when he would hear dad talk about the past and he knew Fred



and Al both personally.

DR. CRAWFORD: The Key Brothers.

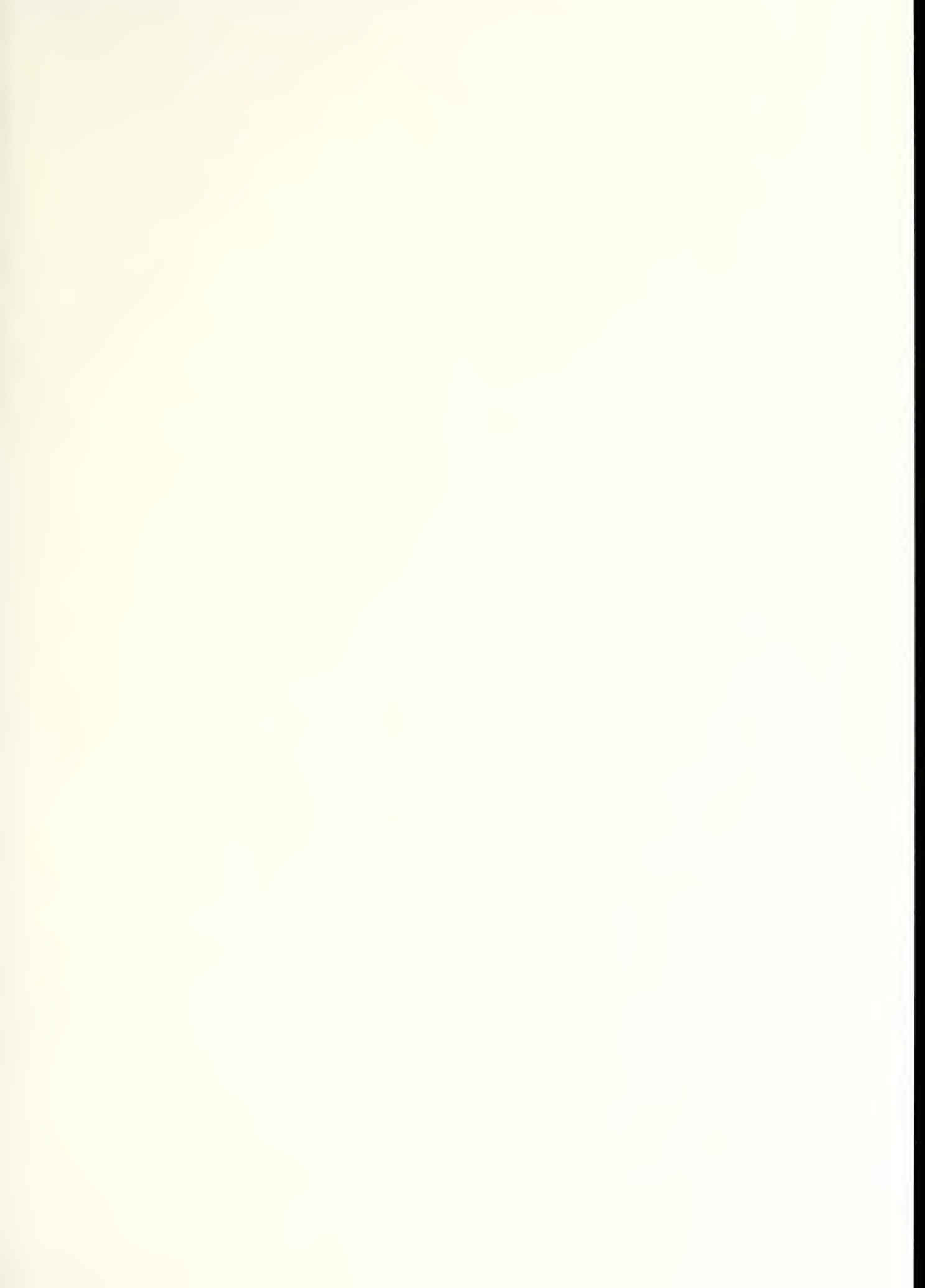
MRS. TOOMEY: Yes. As far as any big hero image, I
don't know of any particular.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you very much.









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